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Editorial – “Pieces of the Planet” Issue One

01/02

e-flux journal #48 — october 2013 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle
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Once there was an idea of a vast human family ready to realize humanistic ideals and internationalist partnerships like the United Nations, and some people called it Globalism. But then the idea got bundled with a way of carrying the sentiment of internationalism over to economics, turning jurisdictional partnerships and trade relations into pretty much the same thing. And its name sounds less like a principle than a process – a making global, a globalization of the earth. And since at least the 1980s it was decided that this is how we would all come together, with the globe as market and the market as globe. But at the same time it is impossible to deny what globalization has confronted us with: our own planet – not as an abstract idea but as a massive geological material fact. Now we live the sensation of tracing our hand over a globe on a tabletop, only the globe is the actual earth itself.

Around the same time this massive reach was first being celebrated, it was also starting to show its limits. The many borders that dissolved in the 1990s did not take long to return in other places and even multiply – between sects, tribes, classes, and of course nation-states. And yet the planetary view of the earth is still there, just split into two entities – a system inhabited by humans on the one hand and, on the other, a big spherical body that is profoundly indifferent to us. Our all-encompassing mastery immediately hits a wall when we realize we know nothing about ourselves on this thing. It is as if the moment the world shrank into the palm of our hand, it also exploded into trillions of tiny microcosms.

In the meantime we need to figure out what to do with all these scattered pieces that seem to be held together by tape, and are likely to explode again into smaller micro-microcosms. And what would they look like? Some of them look like the pieces of world that were not included in the world before, or at least that of the internationalist project. Other pieces look like rogue bits of information left by the road – old game consoles, used batteries, deleted mail, libido, some recordable CDs of soft rock, an old tribe, a fake sect, expired film stock, an animal carcass, or Danish modern furniture with bad upholstery.

But then there is another kind, and these are basically all artworks. These are the action paintings of the planet. They are historical counter-narratives. They are exceptions. One piece wants to join with other pieces to heal the scars of breaking off. Another little Promethean piece wants to explode again and again to make infinitely more of itself. Yet another wants to retire with a good pension on a plinth. These little worlds come in editions you can buy, but

their volatility makes them impossible to possess. And that keeps them somewhat market friendly, but a really horrible challenge to historians who at this point can only watch as historical narratives multiply faster than they can ever hope to keep track.

This issue of the journal is one of several issues to be developed in parallel with Ashkal Alwan's *Home Workspace Program*, with its third edition starting in November as a free, experimental school based in Beirut led by Jalal Toufic and Anton Vidokle.

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